

**Tribal 2.0:**  
**Re-Tooling a Small-Circulation Magazine for the 21st Century**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This report uses *Geist* magazine as a case study, in order to address the ways in which Seth Godin's tribal theory can benefit small-circulation magazines. By "tribe," Godin means the phenomenon whereby groups form around ideas irrespective of the limits of geography. By employing multiple platforms – artifactual, ritual, and virtual – small-circulation magazines can support their own tribes: idea-driven communities. The report focuses on how the use of all of these platforms has helped *Geist* to spread its ideas about literary and visual arts and culture in Canada. It also discusses the successes and challenges inherent in that progression and the reasons why it needs to take place, such as the movement of readers online and the resulting changes to the marketing and editorial process.

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*But there is another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it.*  
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

*It makes increasingly less sense even to talk about a publishing industry, because the core problem publishing solves — the incredible difficulty, complexity, and expense of making something available to the public — has stopped being a problem.*  
Clay Shirky

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Marshall McLuhan's most famous work, *Understanding Media*, published in 1964, he proposed that the medium is the message, meaning that "it is not the content or use of the innovation, but the change in inter-personal dynamics that the innovation brings with it" that is the message (Federman). McLuhan's ideas dovetail with John Berger's statement that "seeing comes before words" (1), as it serves to explain the changes taking place in society today: because of the Internet the message is changing; how society sees is changing. For publications that have relied on being seen in a particular way, such as books, magazines, and newspapers, this change is drastic and, although many have ventured into and even been absorbed by the online world, in 2008 publishers were just beginning to learn how to use digital media to their advantage. There are tried and true ways of successfully designing and promoting an ink-and-paper publication, but methods of successfully integrating print with online publishing, or changing print to online, have only begun to be explored and are not yet proven. This is not merely because people have shifted to the Internet but rather, as McLuhan says, because in shifting to a new medium, society has undergone profound changes.

Consumers no longer consume as they once did; they do not respond to advertising campaigns in the same way as they did twenty years ago, nor do they read or comprehend in the same manner. As a result of this shift, the publishing industry is "caught between dreams of e-readers that hold thousands of books and weigh less than a sheet of paper and lamentations over the demise of the beloved...object" while they "continue their mad dash toward the digital future" (Teicher 17). In a recent series of blog postings, Clay Shirky, author of *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, opined that we are living through a revolution akin to that of the fifteenth century when



Gutenberg invented movable type and revolutionized book publishing. Shirky writes that “when someone demands to know how we are going to replace newspapers, they are really demanding to be told that we are not living through a revolution. They are demanding to be told that old systems won’t break before new systems are in place.” Shirky believes that the publishing industry is failing because the product it creates is no longer as important to readers, because they can now access much of what they once got from paper publishing from the Net. Though his universe sounds bleak from a paper-and-ink perspective, if one were to follow his lead and ask not “How do we save newspapers, magazines, and books?” but instead ask “How do we save culture, society, and art?” perhaps the challenges to the publishing industry are not so insurmountable. If the paper artifact is no longer the central concern, but rather has become an adjunct to the ideal goal of promoting ideas and quality writing, then the industry will change, yes, but not die.

In his new book, *Tribes*, marketing pundit Seth Godin suggests that the future is tribal. By this he means that communities of individuals have begun to form that are “connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea” irrespective of geography (Godin 1). Godin articulates an idea that has been coming clear for some time now: that this movement is a result of the new medium – the Internet; people cluster around websites and e-publications the way they once did around organizations and print things. Because the Internet has eliminated geographic and temporal concerns, individuals now have the opportunity to align themselves with whatever they see fit. If this is true, and as publishers are the traditional purveyors of ideas, then it follows that newspapers, magazines, and books are among the best poised to make use of this development. Arianna Huffington, a leading blogger, agrees; more than that, she believes that “magazines are most perfectly suited to taking advantage of the

things that define the online experience,” because the Net “allows publications to build on and deepen the relationship founded on [niche] interests through instant feedback and interaction.” I would add to her statement that small-circulation cultural magazines are among the periodicals best suited to excelling, because many of them are labours of love formed around developing and promoting ideas and quality writing and artwork that often do not make it into their larger counterparts. In Canada, this has certainly been true, as many small-circulation magazines have provided the launching pad for some of the greatest writers and artists this country has produced. This is not to say that larger magazines like *Vogue* or *Cottage Life* do not have tribal followings on which they can capitalize as well; rather, that small magazines have the opportunity to say: “this is what you want, only we have it” and “people will pay the premium price because that’s the only place they can get it” (Godin, “Seth Godin Thinks You’re Boring”).

A perfect example of this kind of tribe is *Geist* magazine, the most widely circulated literary and cultural magazine in Canada, with a readership of 10,000 per issue. Over the past two decades, *Geist* has created its own tribal following through the magazine (artifact), events (ritual), and most recently its website (virtual). Applying Godin’s argument, the survival of *Geist* should not be based on the survival of the magazine, but rather on the survival of the ideas, or “spirit,” that prompted the original publication of the magazine itself. In fact, promoting the tribe using not only the artifact of the magazine, but also through ritual and virtual means, will allow *Geist*’s intellectual agenda to move successfully into the new digital age.

## 2.0 THE TRIBE

Before investigating a magazine's ability to form a tribe, it is necessary to discuss in more detail Seth Godin's concept of a tribe. The idea of humans operating in a tribe is as old as civilization and traditionally refers to groups who are geographically linked. Because the Internet has eliminated limits of geography, however, Godin proposes that people worldwide have formed tribes focused on ideas and interests, which means that "existing tribes are bigger... [and] that there are now more [types of] tribes...[than] could ever have existed before" (Godin, "Tribes" 4). In order to be a tribe in modern-day society, "a group needs only two things...a shared interest and a way to communicate" (Godin, "Tribes" 2); and all the "new tools available...Facebook and Ning and Meetup and Twitter. Squidoo and Basecamp and Craigslist and e-mail" and many more (Godin, "Tribes" 4) make it easier for members of any tribe to communicate their shared interests.

Godin also argues that every tribe is searching for a leader. If you are that leader then you have the pleasure of being at the centre of the tribe and "the tribe doesn't have to be encouraged to pay attention, they want to pay attention...you, the middleman will never have to do anything again to get them to do business with you" (Godin, "Seth Godin Thinks You're Boring"). Godin's theory works for many different industries; one example is the recent election of Barack Obama as President of the United States. Mr. Obama successfully led a tribe of people who wanted to see change in America. As Godin suggests, Obama's followers became a part of the campaign, which became known as the "YouTube Election" and the "Facebook Election" because of all the viral media that was produced by followers in an effort to promote his campaign. An ideal example is the music video *Obama Girl*, created by [barelypolitical.com](http://barelypolitical.com), which after thousands of hits online was aired on news channels across the United States. This music video was created

with no connection to Obama's campaign, and yet by eliciting attention increased Obama's news coverage. This is merely one example out of millions of instances that range across all types of businesses. The point is that it is just as possible for a tribe to be led by the editors/writers of a magazine as by anyone else, especially because magazine publishers' main concern is to cater to a group of people with interests similar to their own.

One of the reasons that modern-day tribes are necessary is because of the changes that have taken place in consumer behaviour, thus changing how advertisers and businesses can reach their consumers. The way advertising "grew up was by interrupting people": if "you [had] a message and you [needed] attention, you [got] the [consumer's] attention by paying a middleman or spamming people" (Godin, "Seth Godin Thinks You're Boring"). Today, however, "the Internet and a lot of other things [have] made it so that power went to the people, there aren't three channels any more there are a million...when consumers have that power they don't have to pay attention" (Godin "Seth Godin Thinks You're Boring"). This means that publishers do not need to convince buyers that they should buy the magazine, but rather that the magazine needs to become an aspect of a community with which they are already deeply involved. Purchasing a magazine, or attending a magazine's workshops, or visiting the website of a particular publication, should be about participating in the tribe and, thus, needs to give the individual a sense of belonging. In order to better understand why small-circulation magazines are so well-suited to creating tribes, however, it is necessary to investigate the nature of small-circulation magazines.

### 3.0 THE ARTIFACT: SMALL-CIRCULATION MAGAZINES

*“Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue  
freely according to conscience, above all liberties.”*

John Milton, *Areopagitica*

Magazines Canada, the national professional association of Canadian magazines, defines a small-circulation magazine as having a circulation of fewer than 10,000 (Magazines Canada, “Getting Started”). Although the numbers may be contested, it is certain that small-circulation magazines “operate on passion, ideas, creativity, limited budgets, hard work and copious amounts of volunteer labour” (Gontard 4). It should also be recognized that small-circulation magazines choose to be just that – they deliberately appeal to niche audiences in order to express opinions or showcase writing/artwork that they feel is important, but that may not appeal to the general public. In Canada, “small circulation is not a sign of failure, it is a proud tradition [which has]...started the publishing careers of most of the giants of English and Canadian literature” (Canadian Magazines Blogs, “Facebook”).

#### 3.1 SMALL-CIRCULATION MAGAZINE READERSHIP

Small-circulation magazines focus on a wide array of topics, though they are always special-interest, niche publications. For instance, *ricepaper magazine* has devoted itself to showcasing Asian-Canadian writing; *Momentum* is a magazine for “self-propelled people” (those who ride bikes); and *Geist* exists as: “a magazine of ideas and culture made in Canada with a strong literary focus and a sense of humour” (About *Geist*). By no means does a small-circulation magazine have to be literary; however, many small-circulation magazines specialize in literature and culture.

### 3.2 FUNDING FOR SMALL-CIRCULATION MAGAZINES

According to Magazines Canada, “revenue in the small magazines field comes from all over – advertising dollars, government grants, private donations and even family members.” As Elizabeth Gontard observed in her report *Raising the Revenue at a Small-Circulation Magazine*: “[small-circulation] magazines are generally considered...niche publications with a limited audience,” so they are not considered “a prime advertising venue because advertisers are looking for the highest return on their investment and the greatest reach for their advertising dollar” (Gontard 5). Though in mainstream publications advertising makes up an average of 60% of a magazine’s revenue, for small-circulation magazines this number is far lower (Gontard 7). In fact, many of the ads in such publications are exchange ads, or contra ads, which are usually provided by the magazine in exchange for the client’s own services and any profit to the magazine is gained indirectly, if at all (Gontard 5).

In Canada, all magazines, including small-circulation magazines, have traditionally relied heavily on the Canadian Magazine Fund (CMF) and the Publications Assistance Program (PAP). On January 27, 2009, however, the Conservative government announced the dissolution of the CMF and PAP – and announced that these programs would be replaced by the Canadian Periodical Fund, with a budget of \$30 million over the next two years, in order to support continued access to Canadian magazines and community newspapers (Government of Canada). Jim Everson, the Executive Director of Public Relations for Magazines Canada, has lauded this change as an investment that “provides much needed stability for the sector” by updating “the existing framework and [providing] greater flexibility and targeting of support.”

There are, however, problems with the new structure (Magazines Canada “News”). For example, Canadian Heritage has “put a floor on any funding at

5,000 annual circulation in the new Canada Periodical Fund starting April 2010” (Canadian Magazines Blog, “Unintended Consequences”). The argument is that it is too expensive to administer “small amounts, to small-circulation titles,” a statement that the industry disagrees with (Canadian Magazines Blog, “Unintended Consequences”). The reality in Canada, despite the numbers mentioned above, is that “most literary and cultural publications do not have press runs, let alone paid circulation, in excess of 5,000 copies annually” and “all literary and cultural publications rely on government funding to assist in their audience development and marketing” (Canadian Magazines Blog, “Unintended Consequences”). The new decision would take away funding from such prestigious, well-established periodicals as *The Malahat Review*, *ARC Poetry*, and *Prairie Fire*, important cultural publications that have launched the careers of writers and poets who might not otherwise have been heard. As this change has taken place so recently, it is impossible in spring 2009 to know what lies ahead for small-circulation magazine funding in Canada. Informed observers have speculated that Heritage Canada “did not anticipate the impact” of their decision and that the goal is not to shoot small-circulation magazines in the metaphorical foot (Canadian Magazines Blog “Unintended Consequences”). Even those magazines like *Geist* that have been able, through Herculean efforts, to carry out constant circulation drives and to raise money from private foundations, like the \$120,000 (over three years) grant that *Geist* received in 2003 from the Tula Foundation (Gontard 12), have relied on the support of Canadian Heritage. The decisions on the part of Parliament will compromise all small-circulation magazines and could prove deadly for some of them.

### 3.3 WHY SMALL-CIRCULATION MAGAZINES ARE TRIBES

Clearly, many small-circulation magazines need to explore new marketing

and fundraising avenues in order to combat the current economic crisis and the pressures of the digital world. This is where a magazine's tribe can be useful. Magazines, by definition, have already secured a following, or tribe, of readers. Many businesses need to spend hours finding a way to create a movement, while magazines already have a movement in motion. Although Godin's theories focus on Internet examples, he is the first to say that "the real power of tribes has nothing to do with the Internet and everything to do with people" ("Tribes" 6): thus, as magazines of today often operate on multiple platforms, they are already set to take advantage of the many different opportunities to communicate with their tribes. Publishers can accomplish this by capitalizing on their existing artifact, by creating rituals that bring their tribe together, and by creating a virtual presence, which can encourage members of the tribe to communicate with each other.

Seth Godin's tribal theory is especially applicable to small-circulation magazines, because they appeal to a particular niche group, and "people will pay the premium price [if] that's the only place they can get it" (Godin, "Seth Godin Thinks You're Boring"). The reader who subscribes to a small-circulation magazine, as a specialty product, takes a special interest in the material that the magazine publishes. The mission of larger-circulation, general-interest magazines is to publish enough material that there is something for everyone, whereas small-circulation magazines have more specific agendas. A good example of a magazine that has already begun to focus on building its tribe is *Geist*, which has a long history of working to involve people in its community through their physical artifact, event planning, and online presence.

### 3.4 *GEIST*: THE ARTIFACT

Stephen Osborne began *Geist* magazine in 1990. At the time, he intended



to publish five times a year, but he quickly discovered the amount of time that four publications would require (Gontard 6). At first *Geist* mostly published the work of the editorial board – writers and publishers with whom Osborne had worked before – and his own work, but over the years this has changed substantially. By 2002, *Geist* subscriptions and single-copy sales had reached 7,000 and the readership, including the pass-along rate, was estimated at 25,000 (Gontard 7). In fact,

though the magazine started humbly, from the very beginning there were plans for the magazine to grow. Increasing subscriptions and securing renewals were also seen as important to the magazine’s expansion and to this end...Osborne developed a database to track contributors, submissions and donors. (Gontard 7)

This is significant to the understanding of small-circulation magazines, in comparison to larger magazines. Small-circulation magazines like *Geist* have the drive to grow larger, and like other publishing concerns they must grow or die. But there is a limit to the growth that niche magazines can realistically project because they tend to be too specialized to appeal to the populace at large.

The official entity that publishes *Geist* is the Geist Foundation, a non-profit organization formed shortly after the publication began. The

Foundation’s mandate states that the Foundation exists “to organize and encourage cultural activities that bring the work of Canadian writers and artists to public attention, explore the lines between fiction and non-fiction, and present new views of the connective tissues of this place Canada.” (Gontard 6–7)

*Geist*’s own statement for many years was is that “the heart of [their] enterprise is the imaginary country that some of us inhabit from time to time, and which often has something to do with Canada” (About *Geist*). Thus, *Geist* creates a

forum through poetry, prose, and artwork that inspires Canadians to discuss and reflect on their own culture and identity. Although theoretically this topic is of wide general interest, like most small-circulation magazines, *Geist* is a niche publication with a select audience.

In addition, *Geist* has a remarkably strong curatorial vision. Robert Fulford writes that there are

three qualities [which] set it apart from most magazines in its class. First, it carries photographs of considerable power, chosen for their ability to point out something we might not otherwise notice in urban life. Second, populist references fill its pages; the perfect *Geist* story would take place in a donut shop. Third (and this is the most exceptional part), the writing seems carefully edited. (Fulford)

It is this last quality that sets *Geist* apart from the rest as “most literary journals [which] show little evidence of editorial attention, and some editors pride themselves on leaving the writers’ work alone,” whereas “Osborne...and Mary Schendlinger...carefully massage the prose” (Fulford). Because of this practice, everything that *Geist* publishes sounds like *Geist* and the magazine’s readership subscribes to the publication because of its consistent curatorial vision rather than particular writers or subjects.

In focusing on building a tribe, then, *Geist* magazine has a strong platform to speak from. The publishers understand not only the strengths of their industry, but the strengths of their own publication. In addition, the publisher of *Geist*, Stephen Osborne, acts as the leader of the *Geist* tribe. He is a recognized member of the artistic community, having received numerous awards, including the National Magazine Award for Outstanding Achievement in 2004 and the City of Vancouver Arts Award for Writing and Publishing (Gontard 9) enhancing his own credibility, as well as that of the magazine, through his achievements. He also

maintains many connections within the artistic community, so that he can attract some of the best artists and writers in Canada today, which keeps the magazine impressive and current. It should be noted that all of those who worked with Osborne in founding *Geist* magazine are formidable members of the publishing industry in Canada with knowledge that extends into all aspects of publishing. For this reason they knew early on that they wanted to create something greater than a magazine. In fact, the reason for the Geist Foundation's existence was simple: although everyone involved in the magazine loved publishing it, ultimately they wanted "to do more about culture, especially writing and reading and publishing culture" (Schendlinger).

#### 4.0 THE RITUAL

*There are two ingredients to this remarkability. The first...is the idea of ritual. By changing the way the product is created and distributed, they add a religious and spiritual element to the process... Second, they're not trying to sell the most. That's critical.*

Seth Godin, "That Doesn't Make Sense"

Events like those organized and hosted by *Geist* express an important aspect of any tribe: its rituals. These rituals create an arena in which members of the tribe can come together to participate in a discussion about the vision of their tribe. Rituals are important, because they act as a kind of social currency – they advertise something about who you are as a person (or an organization), and they give you something in common with other people. Rituals also act as a kind of advertisement for the tribe and attract new members. Ritual is not restricted to religions; in fact, for magazines the most basic ritual is reading the magazine itself. *Geist's* symbol of a steaming coffee mug references this very ritual: the act of reading a magazine curled up with a mug of coffee is an image that is familiar and comfortable. The reader understands that *Geist* takes time to consume, that reading it is in itself a ritual in which they, and every other member of the tribe, engage.

In today's fast-paced world, however, fewer and fewer people are reading print magazines or reading any print literature. In fact, in the United States a recent survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts showed that less than half of the American public reads literature, and for Canada the numbers are similar (PNB). In addition, recent PNB data showed that approximately 39% of Canadians, male and female, read magazines. These realities are a challenge for magazines like *Geist* not only because they publish

work that is considered literary work but also because their readers are self-professed readers of literature. In fact, a *Geist* readers' survey, executed in 2001, showed that *Geist* "readers spend 76% more on books than the general population, and 49% read more than 15 books during the last year" (*Geist*, Audience Information). In addition, 96% of *Geist* readers bought up to fifteen Canadian books in the twelve months prior to the survey, and 84% of these were purchased from independent bookstores (*Geist*, Audience Information). A more recent study, conducted in 2008, provided similar data although exact details were unavailable at the time of this paper.

Because of these statistics, the ritual of reading the magazine is diminishing in importance. Magazines need to create other kinds of rituals in order to attract other kinds of readers; an individual who wants to attend a reading, for example, may not necessarily want to curl up with a magazine. Just as religious followers go to church in order to show their faith, small-circulation magazines must be able to create rituals by which their followers can show their "faith" in the magazine. Events are one way to do so. *The Walrus*, for example, hosts extravagant events with special guest speakers and expensive dinners and tickets on a yearly basis. Smaller-circulation magazines also host events, often in conjunction with joint project festivals like B.C. Book and Magazine Week. *Geist*, however, is a small-circulation magazine that hosts many events, making them an ideal example of the types of rituals that small-circulation magazines can host.

#### 4.1 *GEIST*: THE RITUALS

*Geist* has been creating and hosting new and different rituals for its tribe to participate in since the magazine's inception. These rituals take the form of events – readings, festivals, workshops, and literary competitions – that promote the agenda of the magazine (often providing it with publishable work as well),

while inviting followers to feel as though they are participating in a conversation with the magazine – often literally. It is ultimately this act of “conversation” that is so important to the promotion of a tribe through ritual: if people are taking part in your events/rituals, they are talking about taking part in them, which means they are talking about you to people who are potential participants in your tribe, and so on and so on.

For *Geist*, the earliest incarnation of ritual was the *Geist* Evenings of Dinner and Diversion in the early 1990s. The Foundation “would reserve a restaurant for an evening and pack in 100 people, and bring in a speaker,” such as Howard White or Susan Crean (Schendlinger). By participating as speakers, these individuals attached themselves and their own tribal following to *Geist*’s. For the dinners, the magazine collected enough money to pay for the restaurant and the speaker, and in return gathered their tribe together and also usually published a written version of the speaker’s presentation in the magazine (Schendlinger). Other early rituals were readings, co-sponsored with Duthie Books, as well as launches for particular issues (Schendlinger). The co-sponsorship of the readings again allowed *Geist* to draw not only on its tribe, but also on that of Duthie Books.

For small-circulation magazines, creating partnerships with other organizations is important to the tribe, because it enables them to attract the other organizations’ tribes to their own. *Geist* has established these relationships with other organizations that advance *Geist*’s cultural agenda in the arenas of film, dance, and theatre, as well as reading and writing. These partnerships allow *Geist* to advertise its artifact while performing its rituals in new forums. This is accomplished in different ways. In *Geist*’s partnership with the PuSh Festival, an annual theatre festival held in Vancouver, an agreement was reached where the first 200 purchasers of the PuSh Pass received a one-year subscription to *Geist* as a premium. In a joint promotion with Videomatica, a local video rental store, the

store was provided with copies of *Geist* to be given away at events; each copy had a coupon attached that allowed Videomatica customers to subscribe to a year of *Geist* at a lower cost. This same plan was implemented with several other festivals throughout the country. Up to 200 copies of *Geist* were provided to several literary and cultural festivals to be used as door prizes or give-aways. For *Geist*, such partnerships have proven effective in building the magazine's subscription base as well as advertising other events, and in furthering the Geist Foundation's larger goals. Aligning the magazine with all of these different tribes, and seeking out tribes whose followers have similar interests to its own, is one of the ways in which *Geist* has consistently made their events successful and helped their tribe to grow. While the magazine serves as a connecting tool for the tribe, the events are no less a part of what makes *Geist*, *Geist*. In order to understand further the benefits of events for *Geist*'s tribe, I will discuss several events held between May and August of 2008.

#### 4.1.1 Readings

One reading that *Geist* sponsored in May 2008 was the launch of Stephen Henighan's book *A Report on the Afterlife of Culture*, published by Biblioasis Press, as well as his earlier book *A Grave in the Air*, published by Thistledown Press. *Geist* provided the manpower for both of these small presses in hosting a launch for Henighan, who is a regular *Geist* columnist, while he was visiting Vancouver to attend a conference. This meant that small, independent book publishers, for whom it would not be cost-effective to host a launch on both sides of the country, could promote their books at little cost to themselves. *Geist* was willing to put in the effort to host this event to promote Henighan as a *Geist* author, whose ideas align with the magazine's own intellectual agenda. In organizing this event, *Geist* was also able to draw on the marketing resources

of both small book publishers. They operate in other areas of the country, and their email listserv databases reached over a large territory. In this way, *Geist* gained access to a large group of like-minded individuals. Not only were they able to promote their author using the resources of their own tribe, but also they had access to those of Biblioasis, Thistledown and Henighan himself.

To organize an event with this many co-hosts is also a more cost-efficient method for a small-circulation magazine. Costs are shared among all involved (except the author), and everyone stands to benefit. In the case of the Stephen Henighan launch, costs were even further minimized by holding the event at Pulp Fiction Books, a small bookstore that offers their space for events for free. This was yet another way in which *Geist* was able to promote their tribe, as Pulp Fiction has its own cult following of book lovers in Vancouver, a clientele compatible with *Geist*.

#### 4.1.2 *Writing Contests*

Another type of ritual in which *Geist* engages is a variety of writing contests that are held at the discretion of the editorial board, usually two a year. Contests such as the Short Long-Distance Contest, the Literal Literary Postcard Contest, and the *Geist* Fortune Cookie Contest (new in 2009) are all examples. The reason *Geist* does not run contests that are simply poetry or fiction is because that would not express their personality. By creating these contests, which so strongly reflect *Geist*'s quirky but literary sensibility, they are creating rituals that set them apart from other literary organizations, and in which their readers can actively participate. This, in turn, involves *Geist* readers in the ritual of making the magazine.



#### 4.1.3 *The Memory Festival*

One of the larger events created by *Geist* was the Memory Festival, which was conceived as a “free-floating series of public events that focus[ed] on public and private memory. The events [were] improvised and open-ended and [unfolded] in different venues around the city throughout 2008, the year of British Columbia’s sesquicentennial” (*Geist*, “The Memory Festival”). The Memory Foundation, the board of which comprised Geisters and representatives from Rumble Productions, Simon Fraser University’s Writing and Publishing Program, the Listel Hotel, The Tyee, Theatre Replacement and Fibre Essence, officially hosted the Memory Festival. The festival was officially launched on Remembrance Day 2007, with several presentations and exhibitions. As part of the Memory Festival, *Geist* secured funding for a special project:

six commissioned works by Vancouver-based artists who explore aspects of memory, place and imagination as reflected in their cultural backgrounds and artistic sensibilities. At the heart of each of the commissions lie questions of remembering, forgetting and the nature of memory itself. (*Geist*, “The Memory Festival”)

These visual artworks with a literary component were commissioned from Michael Yahgulanaas, David Champion and Sandra Shields, Faith Moosang, Anne Grant, Goran Basaric, and Christopher Grabowski. It was agreed that each of these works would be launched at a public event, thus marrying the physical objects with a gathering of Memory Festival enthusiasts, and each of the six works would appear in an issue of *Geist* until they had all been published. The Memory Festival events showcased these commissioned artworks, but also included readings and presentations by others, as well as theatre and installation art.

This event succeeded in tapping further into *Geist*’s potential audience by

associating *Geist* and geist.com with several other organizations, which are also quirky and unique in their approach to arts and culture in Canada. Because of the wide base of artists and organizations involved, the Festival could host events of all kinds, thus promoting *Geist's* name in many different cultural milieus to which it does not always have direct access. This also meant that the fan bases of each organization could be accessed when promoting the event online and through word of mouth. In addition, because of the free-floating nature of the Memory Festival, any project hosted by a *Geist* Foundation member could potentially be included. This would work to the benefit of all, as the festival (and *Geist*) would be promoted by the organization running the event and vice versa. Another benefit of having a large board was that it allowed the Memory Festival to take advantage of the many industry connections among the members. For example, one foundation member had connections with the *Vancouver Sun* and he easily persuaded the book editor to have a piece written on the launch for Michael Yahgulanaas's commissioned work. The feature appeared in both the print and online versions of the newspaper.

Another important aspect of the Memory Festival was that it generated copy for the magazine. This is important not only because it gave the magazine high-quality editorial material that was partially supported financially through other sources, but also because it furthered the conversation between the ritual and the artifact. Those who had attended a launch or a reading could later read about it in the magazine, or view the pieces that they had seen first-hand. This gave the artifact of the magazine a new incarnation, as a symbol of that ritual, something that could be saved in memory of the event in which the individual participated. In addition, the materials published in the magazine were also published on *Geist's* website, thus allowing it to take part in the online conversation as well.

#### 4.1.4 Workshops

Another type of event that *Geist* publishers have created is their series of workshops: The Art of Writing Your Life, The Art of the Sentence, The Art of the Short Review, The Art of the Short Narrative, The Art of Cartoons and Comics, and Taking It to the Net. As described on the website, these are “Fun, info-packed, affordable short workshops that deliver practical writing skills” and are “a perfect jump-start for new writers, and a quick, smart tune-up for professionals” (*Geist*, “Taking It to the Net”). Each workshop is led “by *Geist* editors, in comfortable rooms, in salubrious company” (*Geist*, “Taking It to the Net”). These workshops promote *Geist*’s intellectual agenda as *Geist* editors and associates instruct participants in the kind of writing that *Geist* publishes, thus promoting the magazine’s voice and agenda while cultivating new contributors to the magazine. In this way, the workshops speak to the goal of a follower of the tribe to participate in the tribe. Just as religious followers may choose to become participants (as deacons or nuns or priests), members of *Geist*’s tribe can carry out the same roles as writers or volunteers. Thus, attracting followers to workshops provides readers with the opportunity to actively participate in the magazine.

One example of a workshop that was presented during the summer of 2008 is Taking It to the Net, which *Geist* co-sponsored with Simon Fraser University’s Writing and Publishing Program. The workshop was designed as a “hat trick of workshops for do-it-yourself journalists” where participants could “learn how to use blogs, podcasts and YouTube to get [their] opinions out there” (*Geist*, “Taking It to the Net”). The idea behind the workshop was to promote citizen journalism and participatory media by inviting speakers involved with journalism and the new media to speak to those interested in participating. Speakers included John Maxwell, Assistant Professor at SFU’s

Master of Publishing Program and former web entrepreneur; Shannon Rupp, an independent journalist in Vancouver; Alexandra Samuel, co-founder of Social Signal, which builds online communities for non-profit, government, and business clients; and Gary Schilling, a graphic artist with years of experience in print and digital media.

This was an interesting workshop for *Geist* to co-host, as it promoted the idea of citizen journalism as a recognized form. In addition, in organizing the event, both *Geist* and the Writing and Publishing Program advertised their own interest and confidence in both citizen journalism and the online forum. In addition, by aligning themselves with a web-based form, they advertised themselves in that community and participated in the interests of that tribe. Also, bloggers who attended the conference blogged about the experience, creating free advertising for both organizations. In addition, in the process of teaching, Gary Schilling created a blog for the event, and helped participants create their own videoblogs and podcasts, which were then posted to the new page. Thus, during the workshop itself, marketing materials were produced for the magazine by the workshop.

Another way in which workshops such as Taking It to the Net have been useful is through the creation of online content for the magazine. *Geist* has created a section on the front page of its website that is labelled “The Writer’s Toolbox,” which reveals tips and tricks that writers can use to improve their writing. Many of these tips and tricks are also used in various *Geist* workshops, and so they act as a kind of advertising or reinforcement for the workshops themselves, and for writers who want to get their work published in the magazine. Although content from Taking It to the Net has not yet been added to this list, it could be a notable asset as well, as there are not a great many credible sources online which can instruct the layperson in writing for the web. This

creation of online content is also important within the larger conversation of *Geist's* presence on the Internet, and thus will be discussed further as this report explores of the virtual presence of small-circulation magazines online.

## 5.0 THE VIRTUAL

*No discussion of the future of the book is complete without someone saying, as if they'd thought of it first, "But books are tactile and sensory as well as intellectual, what about the feel and smell?" Yeah, I like to read in the bath, I like to scribble in the margins, etc...[but] I read books, read blogs, I twitter compulsively. I use these different formats for different kinds of experience.*

Sebastian Mary Harrington, *If:Book*

In the Western world, Internet use has only continued to increase; in fact, Morgan Stanley estimates that there are 3.9 billion Internet users worldwide (Morgan Stanley, "Technology/Internet Trends"). In Canada, in 2006, "an estimated 16.8 million adult Canadians, or 68%, used the Internet for personal non-business reasons during the 12 months prior to the survey" (Statistics Canada). And approximately "7.9 million Canadian households (61%) were connected to the Internet" (Statistics Canada), while approximately 98% of K–12 classrooms are connected to the Net (Schmar-Dobler). Given these numbers, it makes sense that any kind of business, including magazines, would want to find their niche in the still-growing online world.

This is even more important when a business's goal is to build a tribe. A continuing web presence allows those who are already members of a tribe to remain involved, because no business can run events all the time. In his book *Tribes*, Seth Godin tells the story of Gary Glassman, who began the tribe CrossFit.com (60–61). On this particular site exercise fanatics around the world take part in daily workout challenges and post their times. Godin explains that what Glassman understood was the need for a tribe to create an "environment where the tribe not only *wants* to share news and ideas and camaraderie with one another, but is *able* to" (Tribes 61). For CrossFit.com the website is the place where fellow exercise enthusiasts can do just that, and "the tribe grows because

individuals proudly segregate themselves and speak up on behalf of the tribe, simultaneously recruiting and hazing new members.” Through this example, Godin discusses the need for a website where the members of the tribe are able to do so much of the work. This is, of course, the goal of any tribe. Someone, in this case Gary Glassman, has to do the work of starting the tribe, but ultimately members of the tribe should want to go out into the world and promote the tribe themselves.

### 5.1 MAGAZINES AND THE INTERNET

The publishing industry, however, has struggled with creating a successful virtual presence. One of the major stumbling blocks for publishers in the online milieu is that online publishing has been seen as “a paper product based on a paper business model, repurposed for the screen” (Herz). This is a common mistake because of the ease with which content can be moved wholesale to the screen. In principle, it makes sense. For all levels of publishing it has always been understood that “content is king”; the most valuable commodity that a publisher has is the ideas that they publish. The difficulty is that individuals do not consume content on the Internet the same way they do in print.

In *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Maryanne Wolf wonders whether

the constructive component at the heart of reading [will] begin to change and potentially atrophy as we shift to computer-presented text, in which massive amounts of information appear instantaneously?... when seemingly complete visual information is given almost simultaneously, as it is in many digital presentations, is there either sufficient time or sufficient motivation to process the information more inferentially, analytically, and critically? (Wolf 16)

Wolf is correct to worry. As Nicholas Carr observes in his article “Is Google

Making Us Stupid?": "the human brain is almost infinitely malleable...Nerve cells routinely break old connections and form new ones" in fact, "the brain has the ability to reprogram itself on the fly, altering the way it functions" (James Olds in Carr). Gary Small, a neuroscientist and the author of *iBrain*, tells readers that "we are changing the environment. The average young person now spends nine hours a day exposing their brain to technology. Evolution is an advancement from moment to moment and what we are seeing is technology affecting our evolution" (Casciato). In fact,

the union of reading and technology on the Internet is causing educators to take a new look at what it means to be literate in today's society...New forms of literacy call upon students to know how to read and write not only in the print world but also in the digital world.  
(Schmar-Dobler)

For magazines, these changes in reading highlight the way in which the message must change because of changes to the medium. In discussing early magazine websites, J.C. Herz comments on the tendency for magazines to post 4,000-word articles directly from the print magazine to the website as being detrimental, because very few readers are willing to read that much online: reading online is not the same as curling up in bed with a good book or magazine – especially because research has shown that individuals do not read online, they scan. Therefore, magazines that move their content directly online run the risk of losing the reader's attention before he has read half the article. That being said, magazines are not wrong in identifying content as their most valuable resource. It is necessary, then, to determine how they can re-imagine themselves to create and maintain an online presence. Most important, in doing so, is that they see their virtual location as a place that, like CrossFit.com, will gather their members together and give them a place to converse with each other about the magazine and all its various platforms.



## 5.2 CANADIAN SMALL-CIRCULATION MAGAZINES AND THE INTERNET

In Canada, small-circulation magazines take a variety of approaches to creating a presence on the Net. Magazines like *Fuse*, *Room*, *Malahat Review*, and *Prairie Fire*, all well-known literary magazines with smaller circulations than *Geist's*, use their websites mainly to promote subscription sales. You cannot access any of their content for free, nor can you see the kind of poetry and prose that you would read if you subscribed to the print publication. Instead, online users can learn which authors have been published, how to subscribe, and how to submit, as well as what advertising opportunities are available. These magazines' websites serve as a method by which they can communicate with readers who are already familiar with the publication, rather than introducing themselves to those who don't know the publication. Although some of these websites do incorporate extras like RSS feeds, these serve only to notify subscribers when a new issue comes out. The website itself changes very little over the course of many months.

The website of *Broken Pencil* is an example of another type of website for small-circulation magazines. It is set up more like a blog, with postings running down the length of the page, and a left-hand bar offering access to different postings based on their headings. One may suppose that this works for *Broken Pencil* because the magazine caters to the kind of readers who are already participants in blogging culture and so find the layout familiar. The postings themselves often consist of content from the print magazine; however, they may also be notices of upcoming events that would interest the reader. This design choice accomplishes two things: first, the website content does not become stale, but the editors do not constantly have to publish and edit new pieces; and second, it advances the interest of the tribe by allying *Broken Pencil* with other events and organizers, much as *Geist* does with its events. In addition, the *Broken Pencil* website invites reader comments and the content changes on a regular basis,

making it a far more interactive experience for the user. It is the interactive aspect of *Broken Pencil's* website that makes it so strong: it allows its tribe's members to feel as though they are actively participating in a shared project. Also, because the content changes regularly, each time a reader visits, she finds a new site to engage with and explore.

### 5.3 *GEIST*: THE VIRTUAL

Different from all of these is *Geist's* website (one of the first websites for a small-circulation magazine in Canada), which is more similar to the websites of larger circulation magazines, such as *The Walrus*, which has a readership of 60,000 (*The Walrus* 2). The *Geist* website's layout directly reflects the layout and aesthetics of the magazine itself through white space, line weight, and general placement. Like *The Walrus*, *Geist* has also chosen to display many different types of content on their front page, such as a spotlighted story, the Writer's Toolbox, Poetry, Findings, In Camera, etc. In fact, almost every section of the magazine is given some space on the front page, juxtaposed with requisite advertising.

*Geist* publishes online-only content, and also publishes most of the magazine's content online for free, thus giving visitors a real introduction to the editorial vision of the magazine. This allows *Geist* to capitalize on the extremely long tail of their articles, thus pulling in authors that might not otherwise appear. This, in turn, works to improve and expand their connections with other tribes. It should be noted, however, that each of the articles is published in full, which often means that articles of 4,000 words or more are posted on a single page. In addition, the articles do not invite interactivity, making the website somewhat less effective. Despite this, however, *Geist* editors certainly understand, and are supported by their readers' responses in this belief, that they will be able to

capitalize on their long tail of content.

Finally, *Geist* employs several additional types of technology in order to promote an online presence. The most relevant to the website is the addition of blogs, new in 2008 and continuing to grow. Although commenting is not yet enabled on content published to the site, commenting is enabled on *Geist*'s blogs, helping to make the site more interactive. In addition, *Geist* has chosen to add RSS, social bookmarking, Facebook, and Twitter, among others. It also maintains a strong email listserve database, which is employed to promote events, adding to the tribe's sense of contact with *Geist*. These activities are equally important to the tribe, because they allow *Geist* to reach out further into their communities and attract new members. Just as a magazine publishes different types of content for different types of readers, so a website must employ different types of technology to attract different kinds of surfers. In order to understand how a small-circulation magazine can utilize these alternative forms of technology to promote its tribe, I will discuss at more length what these are, and how *Geist* has chosen to employ them.

### 5.3.1 *Blogs*

What is perhaps most interesting about blogs is, as Eric Baumer points out in his new study of blog readers, "blogging is not a solo activity" but instead "the construction of meaning ultimately resides in the auspices of readers, who appreciate...from their own subjective perspective" (Baumer 1–2). The reality and meaning of a blog, then, exists neither solely in the blog itself nor solely in the reader, but rather in the reader's active interpretation of, and interaction with, the blog he is reading. In short, the meaning of blogs is no different than any other published reading and writing, it is simply more immediate. Furthermore, technologies and practices such as commenting, linking, tagging, and trackbacks

enable a level of explicit interaction with the text and the author not available in previous textual media (Baumer 1). In a study by Lenhart and Fox, it was also found that 87% of bloggers allow comments on their blogs and that “features such as comments, blogrolls, friends lists, and RSS feeds...facilitate a sense of community and offer readers additional ways to receive and interact with the blog’s content” (Lenhart/Fox iv). As Baumer points out, “not only is the number of blogs increasing but also the number of blog readers” (Baumer 1).

For magazines, then, the blog serves as a method of generating web content with which a reader can interact directly. This means that the tribe is provided with the opportunity to interact directly with those endowed with the faith of the tribe. Several magazines have already turned to this method of generating both content and marketing in one form. One of the best examples is *The Atlantic*, which includes several links to blogs by Andrew Sullivan, Ross Douthat, Megan McArdle, Marc Ambinder, Ta-Nehisi Coates, James Fallows, Jeffrey Goldberg, Clive Crook and Barbara Wallraff, under the tag of *Voices*. What is interesting is that several of the authors, who had published mainly on paper before, had already begun their blogs before they began posting to *The Atlantic*, meaning that they had already created a presence for themselves in the blogosphere. This works well for *The Atlantic*’s tribe, in much the same way that *Geist*’s event-hosting partnerships work well for it: this magazine is able to increase its web traffic using the following that its bloggers had already developed, and bloggers are able to increase their traffic by associating themselves with *The Atlantic*.

Among the blogs that *Geist* has begun to develop for their website are regular postings by Geisters such as Patty Osborne (writer and designer), Michal Kozlowski (writer and editorial board member), and Trevor Battye (writer and advertising/marketing rep). Unlike the blogs on *The Atlantic*, *Geist* blogs are not

presented individually, but are a mish-mash of notes by whoever happens to post. The strength of *The Atlantic's* blogs is that each is a separate voice tying itself to the credo of the Atlantic; the blogs are written by individuals with unique styles and voices to whom the reader may become attached in much the same way that he enjoys a particular author. Because blogs are new to the *Geist* website, it is not yet known whether they have improved website traffic; yet it seems likely that over time, as the magazine becomes more comfortable with this forum, it will enhance their tribe's sense of access to the magazine and its editors.

### 5.3.2 *Rss Feeds*

The *Geist* website also uses RSS: “an RSS document (which is called a “feed,” “web feed” or “channel”) includes full or summarized text, plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship” (Wikipedia, “RSS”). RSS feeds allow “publishers [to] syndicate content automatically” and “they benefit readers who want to subscribe to timely updates from favored websites or to aggregate feeds from many sites into one place” (Wikipedia, “RSS”). This means that those subscribers to a website's RSS receive one-line updates that advise them of new content that has been posted. These feeds are very popular for blogs and other aggregators as they allow the site to keep readers apprised of changes easily, thus keeping tribal members up to date on changes to their tribe, and reminding them about the site at regular intervals. This is useful for *Geist's* website, as it allows *Geist* to easily tell their online tribe when they have posted new material, or when something on the website changes.

### 5.3.3 *Social Bookmarking*

Yet another form of technology that magazines can use is a social bookmarking system. In such a system, users create bookmarks for web pages

by clicking on a link at the bottom of a page that they want to remember (be it a YouTube video or a written article), and these in turn are shared with the community through the bookmarking system. What is interesting about these sites is that the postings are created and moderated by the community, allowing each reader to become a participant who interacts with and modifies the site itself. The theory behind this is that humans are still better filters than computers and better able to determine what is worth seeing and what is not.

There are many different types of social bookmarking systems. Digg is a system where anyone can “digg” anything; the more “diggs” a topic gets (whether it be a photo, a blog article, a newspaper article, or a cartoon) the higher it climbs on Digg’s home page and the more visible it becomes among the many topics available for other people to read and “digg.” There are other types of social bookmarking systems springing up as well. While Digg’s content is determined completely by Diggers; in other systems, content is passed through a moderator before it reaches the reader. Another site of interest is StumbleUpon, which suggests websites to its readers based on the interests listed in each reader’s profile. Once a reader has “stumbled upon” a website, he gives the website either a thumbs up or a thumbs down, moving the page up or down in StumbleUpon’s rankings. Links to each of these websites were recently installed at the end of *Geist*’s content, thus allowing members of the tribe to promote *Geist* using other social bookmarking means.

Each of these sites, in effect, creates its own tribe – a group of people who are all participating in the same actions. In most cases, users are able to create identities based on their interests, which allows them to break up into even smaller groups within the tribe: Digg users who read literature, enjoy hotrod cars, etc. The advantage of this kind of technology for a publication like *Geist* is that the magazine’s website is able to tap into a tribe already connected through the

social bookmarking system. These systems, then, are yet another way that *Geist* has increased access to their online tribe.

#### 5.3.4 *Facebook & Twitter*

*Geist* also uses Facebook and Twitter in order to communicate with their tribe. On Facebook, *Geist* has a page of which other Facebook participants can become fans. Once they are a fan (i.e. a member of the tribe) *Geist* can let them know about upcoming events, workshops, and contests. Twitter serves a similar purpose. *Geist*'s Office Manager posts tweets throughout the course of the day and followers of her tweets can find out what's going on in the office, as well as information about contests and events. These aspects of *Geist*'s website increase its interactivity by allowing followers on both sites to feel as though they are intimately involved with the inner workings of the magazine.

#### 5.3.5 *Social Currency*

All of the online options mentioned above allow online readers to better interact with their tribe more closely and regularly. They also allow content to be updated frequently with less effort. Another type of interaction is the option of "Email this Article," a feature that many online publishers are now including with each article (Herz). If a user reads and wants to share an article or story with a friend, he can simply click the button, fill out the information, and have it delivered to his friend's inbox. As Herz points out:

When people hit the "E-mail this article" icon, they are using the magazine, and they are increasing that magazine's advertising impressions by the number of recipients in the To: field.

But more important, perhaps, "on successful content sites, the information's value as social currency exceeds its value as a self-contained experience."

This is beneficial because it increases the value of the website to the reader by providing them with an excuse to “strike up a conversation or a way to sustain a conversation” (Herz).

Thus, the website can create value for its members through both online conversation and real-world interactions. Indeed, through each of the different technologies discussed, a website creates a forum for the members of its tribe. For *Geist*, the website is still in its early stages, but it has provided a forum in which to interact with the members of the tribe and allow the tribe to interact with *Geist*. It should also be acknowledged, however, that there are many other options that small-circulation magazines can explore in developing an online presence, some of which are being invented as you read this report. For a small-circulation magazine like *Geist*, it is absolutely essential to have staff or volunteers with that knowledge.



## 6.0 CONNECTING THE TRIBE

*Saying “We need community features!” is like looking at a building and saying “it needs more concrete!” Community features...are all just fancy new pieces of the infrastructure. They are not magical new ways to create something out of nothing.*

Tamara Adlin, *The Tribes Casebook*

Something does not come out of nothing; although creating different platforms upon which the tribe may function is of utmost importance, it is equally important that these platforms can interact with each other. The tribe members are then able to see the platforms as parts of a larger conversation about the tribe itself; each platform is integral to the existence of the whole. It is, therefore, important that each decision made about these platforms fits the tribe’s sense of itself.

*Geist* creates connections between its artifactual, ritual, and virtual presence through cross-marketing. In fact, a constant dialogue goes on between all three through the advertisement of each for the others. For example, in a copy of the print magazine there will be an advertisement for the Writer’s Toolbox, and on the website there will be an advertisement promoting subscriptions to the magazine, and at a workshop each participant will be given a copy of the magazine and a free subscription with enrolment. In this way, each of the tribal platforms is promoted and supported by each of the others.

## 6.1 ADVERTISING EVENTS ON THE WEB

An example of how this cross-advertising works is an artwork and event, RE ME MB ER, with Michael Yahgulanaas, that took place as part of the Memory Festival. The piece consisted of four painted panels that when placed together spelled the word “remember,” while also visually describing a traditional Haida

myth. For RE ME MB ER, as with almost all of *Geist's* events, the majority of the advertising was carried out online. To promote the event, *Geist* staff prepared a series of three email messages and sent them to recipients at intervals over approximately a three-week period. The emails were sent to *Geist* subscribers with addresses near Vancouver, the location of the event, through a program called WhatCounts, which is used for permissions-based marketing. Email announcements were also sent to media contacts, in the hopes that the event would be covered either in print or online. Event information was also posted to *Geist's* Facebook page and announcements were sent to its members based on their location. At a grassroots level, *Geist* staff, interns, and volunteers were asked to invite their friends to the event, often through personalized email or blog. For RE ME MB ER (and other events produced in partnership with other organizations), a slightly different email message was written for the partners (SFU Writing and Publishing Program, Fibre Essence, etc.) to send to their respective email listserves. Through these email campaigns, thousands of people were reached: a total of 1,906 people were emailed through the SFU Writing and Publishing email listserve alone. The numbers fluctuate on *Geist's* email listserve, but these numbers are quite similar; therefore, approximately 4,000 individuals were reached in this campaign.

Each email message included a link to the web page that gave details on the event and promoted it further. This page was carefully designed to act as a teaser for the event itself, thus creating new copy for the site. The spikes revealed in GoogleAnalytics during these email campaigns made it apparent that subscribers were clicking through. A later campaign, for another Memory Festival event on November 11, 2008, showed that the emails increased visits to the site dramatically, upping web traffic to 615 visits in one day, thus promoting the tribe's virtual presence. In order to minimize the bounce rate of these emails,

links were added to the description of each event as well as to the bottom of each page to entice readers to investigate the website further. Links were chosen based on other work created for the magazine by that writer or artist, or based on similar forms. This was useful, as it allowed the magazine to advertise its online content further while promoting the event. As advertising for the Memory Festival events was done almost entirely through the web, the campaigns also increased *Geist* readers' knowledge of the magazine's presence on the Internet. In this way, *Geist* uses events and partnerships to attract their "tribe" to the website and to make them aware of both *Geist* itself and events such as the evening with Yahgulanaas. A reader who received an email could easily forward it to someone who was not a member of the tribe, but might be interested in the event. More important is the connection, or conversation, created on the website about the event. An interesting idea might be to enable comments on event pages so that readers who did not attend could hear about the success of the event from other readers, and thus be encouraged to attend future events.

The other online marketing tools that *Geist* has begun to explore can also be used in advertising events like RE ME MB ER. For example, using a social bookmarking system like Digg could be very useful. As mentioned above, a community creates Digg and thus the community elects what is promoted. If *Geist* staff were each to "digg" the webpage for an event and ask friends to do the same, this could raise awareness of the event in a larger community. This idea was raised at a *Geist* meeting in February 2009: *Geist* staff could be provided with accounts and each time they arrived for work they could "digg" whatever event or webpage *Geist* was making an effort to promote. Another option that was being investigated in early 2009 was advertising through blogs, as well as inviting popular Vancouver bloggers to do short pieces on the events. Another form of advertising on blogs is to create a small blog tag (such as a badge, or banner) that

bloggers can download and display on their site. This shows that they believe in your product/event and are choosing to advertise it. For example Monique Trottier (a Vancouver based litblogger) has posted a badge for the book *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating*, written by two of her fellow Vancouverites, on her blog, SoMisguided.com. In these and other ways *Geist* could create partnerships that would engage the virtual aspects of their tribe.

## 6.2 Other Options

There are many other ways in which *Geist* creates connections between the print magazine, online publications, and events. For example, for the RE MEMBER event, the artwork and writing produced by Michael Yahgulanaas was published online and in the magazine, as well as being shown and read at the launch. Connections are also made by the writing contests that *Geist* runs. The contests are advertised online, and the winning entries are published online and offline (and selected pieces on the Tyee website – a local online newspaper – as well).

Another technique that *Geist* is contemplating is similar to one used by craft magazines that make a pattern available only online so that those reading the magazine have to visit the website in order to get it. Using its own type of content, *Geist* could do the same thing. For example, subscribers to the magazine could receive access to articles written by favoured *Geist* writers only for the website. Another possibility is to abridge longer articles posted online and invite readers who wish to read the whole thing to subscribe to the print version. Another, more time-consuming option would be to create e-editions of the magazine. For example, *Geist* has begun to experiment with publishing a digital edition during the months in which the hard copy does not publish. Advertisements for this would be included in the online and print version so that

those who visit the website, or those who buy a copy at newsstands, would be aware of its presence. In addition, the digital edition will eventually contain live links to authors and their works, advertisers, and other multimedia.

All of these activities serve the same purpose: supporting and furthering the agenda of *Geist's* tribe by connecting each aspect of that tribe to the others. In so doing, members of *Geist's* tribe are conditioned to see the artifactual, ritual, and virtual aspects of the tribe as part of a whole with which they can engage on multiple levels. This means that the tribe can permeate many aspects of an individual's daily life, making it more and more important to them and thus strengthening the tribe itself.

## 7.0 CHALLENGES

*The New Frontier I speak of is not a set of promises –  
it is a set of challenges.*

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

This report, thus far, has examined the advantages for a small-circulation magazine to alter its self-perception in order to see itself as something larger than a print magazine, and thereby to broaden its audience. It is important to recognize, however, that though building a tribe online may help small-circulation magazines to re-tool in the electronic climate, there are still many challenges involved. For most small-circulation magazines, in fact, it is a challenge to release each issue of the magazine on time, which is important as it ensures readers do not forget the magazine's presence. *Geist*, for example, has only three full-time staff, two part-time staff, several contract workers, and a group of interns and volunteers with varying levels of knowledge about magazine publishing, let alone computer and Internet programming. Thus, the most basic challenge, which all small-circulation magazines experience on a daily basis, is lack of time. This is because, "in the online world, hourly or realtime are the frequencies" and "this demands a faster pace" (Monti).

*Geist*, which publishes quarterly, is used to having three months in which to complete all the necessary tasks to publish a well-edited, well-formed artifact. This same time is not available when publishing online. The challenge of creating a successful website, while also ensuring that it reflects the editing standards of the magazine, is one that is omnipresent in the virtual world. Because the Internet demands that websites offer fresh material frequently, it is often more efficient and useful for an individual to post whatever they can as quickly as they can without spending as much time and effort considering the standards so important in print formats. Thus, it is easy to understand why it sometimes takes longer than it should

for material to appear on the web. As Ralph Monti observes in his article “Creating a Vital Web Identity,” “if our staff can’t support, or the markets you serve don’t require, daily updates, you may reconsider being online in the first place.” Although it is important to acknowledge that *Geist* is not striving to produce urgent up-to-the-minute news every day or week, individuals do not continue to check a website if it is not constantly updated. Interestingly, “an irony publishers discovered: although most magazine sites are companions, or supplementary adjuncts, to their print cousins, they are more labor-intensive and demand greater maintenance” (Monti).

Another challenge to supporting a tribe is one that has been mentioned before: money. In his article, Monti suggests that “setting a formal budget to fully develop and maintain a Web site...sends an important message that the company is serious about developing its Web business,” but for small-circulation magazines finding extra resources may not be possible. Monti implies this is necessary because it will show a magazine’s staff that the publishers are as serious about their online presence as their offline presence. Without this focus, staff may not prioritize online work as highly as their work on the offline product. This speaks to another challenge experienced by magazine publishers of any size: a fear of committing to the new medium. In an article for *Executive Publishing*, Bob Sacks, President of the Precision Media Group, writes: “there is a palpable fear of the unknown by many senior managers in the publishing industry...a misplaced, self-preservation reaction caused by our journey into the unknown publishing world of the 21st century.” This is the very same sentiment expressed by Clay Shirky: that the need to cling to the past has caused many publishers, of all types, to shy away from the new medium.

All of these challenges threaten the potential for small-circulation magazines to form and maintain strong tribes. However, they are certainly surmountable

given an effective mindset. Although *Geist* struggles with many of these challenges, its goal of spreading “Geist ideas of literary and cultural life far and wide, and to actively and personally invite other people’s ideas in order to broaden our own horizons and everyone else’s” is what has kept them thriving despite current industry challenges.



## 8.0 CONCLUSIONS

*There is the sense that the main event has happened – the literal and psychological shift from an unwired to a wired world – and that we are now dealing with expansions and refinements on the one hand, and the deeper work of psychological acclimatization on the other.”*

Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies*

There is little question that Clay Shirky was correct when he observed: “the incredible difficulty, complexity, and expense of making something available to the public... has stopped being a problem.” Everyone in the western world is aware that they are able to access a wealth of information and entertainment at the touch of their fingertips, for little cost. It is true that no information is free, yet increasingly information is provided to online users without a direct cost and at their own request. In this sense, Sven Birkerts, author of the aptly titled *The Gutenberg Elegies*, is right – “the main event has happened...and there is no returning to the scene of the crime without facing the fact that everything looks conspicuously different” (xiii). When Birkerts wrote his book in the 1990s, he commented that “our educational systems are in decline; that our students are less and less able to read and comprehend their required texts, and that their aptitude scores have leveled off” (123). The change since he observed these effects over a decade ago, however, has been a move on the part of the education system to redefine the meaning of reading and comprehension. For this reason, Shirky was also correct when he wrote that the question could no longer be “how can we save print media?” but rather must be “how do we save culture, society and art?” In his book *Tribes*, Seth Godin offers an option: create a tribe of which your magazine is only a part. If you give people something to follow, you will survive the electronic age successfully.

There are challenges for small-circulation magazines to achieve the

building of a successful tribe around their ideals. Most of these have to do with shortage of time and money, but there are difficulties inherent in the new medium itself. For “the one thing we know about the future and impact of the Internet is that we know nothing” (Carey 28). In his book *Understanding Media*, McLuhan described what he called a “horseless carriage phase,” which occurred after the invention of the printing press (McLuhan 173). He explained that at that time readers did not value printed books and would often purchase books only to have them copied by a scribe (McLuhan 173). Similarly, today, society still gives the printed book more authority: however, it is likely that as time passes our trust in the new electronic medium will also continue to grow. In fact, there are those who are already lauding the Internet as the medium that will bring about the future of printed culture. For example, Kevin Kelly’s article “Scan This Book!” was written in response to Google’s announcement that “it would digitally scan the books of five major research libraries to make their contents searchable.” Kelly was of course thrilled by this announcement, as he sees this as a chance to make the universal library a reality – like the library at Alexandria, but with no chance of it burning down. More surprising, however, is how Kelly imagines this library taking shape. He writes:

Once digitized, books can be unraveled into single pages or be reduced further, into snippets of a page. These snippets will be remixed into reordered books and virtual bookshelves...the universal library will encourage the creation of virtual “bookshelves” – a collection of texts, some as short as a paragraph, others as long as entire books, that form a library shelf’s worth of specialized information. And as with music playlists...these “bookshelves” will be published and swapped in the public commons. Indeed, some authors will begin to write books to be read as snippets or to be remixed as pages. (Kelly)

These ideas not only shift the definition of a library, but also imply a

further shift in how all printed material is published. Given the changes Kelly envisages, it does not seem a leap to imagine that small-circulation magazines may eventually be forced to move to an online-only existence.

That is not to say that small-circulation, paper-and-ink publications will cease to exist, but that there may be fewer of them. As a publication that has always promoted itself through means other than its print magazine, *Geist* is one of the best examples of a Canadian small-circulation magazine that has the wherewithal to flourish in the brave new digital world. By supporting its tribe through artifactual, ritual, and virtual means, *Geist* has been able to communicate with its tribe, and the tribe has opportunities to communicate with each other. This, in turn, has allowed *Geist's* publishers to spread their values and ideas about arts and culture in Canada.

This report serves as a signpost of the opportunities and challenges facing small-circulation magazines in Canada at this moment. As Sven Birkerts suggests, “transitions like the one from print to electronic media do not take place without...reweaving the entire social and cultural web” (123) and the effects of the changes to society due to the Internet are yet to be completely experienced and understood. Though the future is uncertain, there are sure to be many more opportunities as the Internet continues to grow and to change how society functions. Although there are no absolutely certain methods of promoting small-circulation magazines in today's new environment, it is clear that by employing multiple platforms, magazines have a better chance of increasing their exposure to their individual readership, and thus prospering.

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